EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES

AVENGERS

THE CROSSING

MARVEL UNIVERSE

SEPTEMBER 1995

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

HARRAS ♦ KAVANAGH ♦ DEODATO

IT BEGINS WITH A JOURNEY'S END.

WITH A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS FALL THROUGH FLUID TIME AND SPACE.

HOME.

UHN

AND AS THE EONS FLOW ABOUT HER, THIS LONE TRAVELER PRAYS SHE WILL ONCE MORE FIND WHAT SHE IS SO DESPERATELY SEEKING.

I *NEVER* THOUGHT IT WOULD BE LIKE THAT!

FOR A FEW MINUTES THERE, I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO *DIE* OUT THERE IN THE *VOID*.

BUT I DID IT! I MADE THE *LEAP* BACK.

THAT'S *ALL* THAT MATTERS. I'VE COME --

-- HOME?

OH NO.

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WHERE AM I?

IT HAS THE LOOK OF NEW YORK. PERHAPS EVEN THE SMELL OF THE CITY **RITA DEMARA** LEFT SO LONG AGO.

BUT ALL IT TAKES IS ONE LOOK TO CONFIRM THAT SHE STILL HAS A LONG WAY TO GO.

TIMES SQUARE

-- THIS IS A CLASS ALPHA ALERT. REPEATING, THIS IS A HIGHEST LEVEL SECURITY BREACH.

THE LAST TWO REMAINING RENEGADES HAVE BEEN SPOTTED IN THE TIMES SQUARE QUARTER. THEY ARE TO BE CONSIDERED **ARMED** AND **EXTREMELY** DANGEROUS.

BY ORDER OF HER IMPERIAL MAJESTY, ALL CITIZENS ARE ORDERED TO EVACUATE THE LOCATION IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THE REBELS' APPREHENSION BY THE AUTHORITIES.

BOOM

WELL, THEY *GOT* US, 'TASHA.

I GUESS IT WAS WORTH A TRY, *EH*, BABE?

IT WAS, *CLINT*. IT *WAS*.

BUT IF WE ARE TO *DIE* TODAY, LET US GO OUT WITH *STYLE*, MY FRIEND.

LET US GO OUT LIKE **AVENGERS**

THOK

SHE **KNOWS** THESE TWO -- OR SHE **THINKS** SHE DOES -- FROM HER PAST LIFE IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

THE ARCHER, **HAWKEYE**, AND THE ELEGANT **BLACK WIDOW**, MAINSTAYS OF THAT FELLOWSHIP OF HEROES KNOWN AS THE MIGHTY AVENGERS.

LDER, PERHAPS.

BUT IT IS THEM... AND APPARENTLY, THEY ARE HEROES NO LONGER.

BUDDY, YOU'VE BEEN LISTENIN' TO PROPAGANDA TOO LONG.

I WOULDN'T HURT AN INNO --

FSHAM

AAARGH

OKAY, AVENGER -- DROP IT!

OR YOUR PRETTY LITTLE ARROW IS GONNA HAVE TO GO THROUGH THIS BIRD TO GET TO ME.

PLEASE!

SHE'S MY WIFE -- DON'T HURT HER!

YOU *NAILED* 'IM, DOUG. GOOD GOING.

NOW, LET'S BRING HER IN.

CLINT!

C'MON, WIDOW. YOU'RE THE *LAST*, AND YOU'VE GOT A DATE WITH HER MAJESTY'S FIRING SQUAD.

I HOPE THEY DON'T *MISS* LIKE LAST --

YOU?!

DEMEARA, IT ALL STARTED WITH YOU!

FOR PITY'S SAKE, STAY AWAY FROM THE *MANSION!* *STAY AWAY!*

AND IN THE CROWD...

CLINT -- DEAD. NATASHA -- AS GOOD AS. I'M *ALL* THAT'S LEFT.

AND THAT GIRL -- IT *IS* HER. SWEET AGON, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, I COULD *NEVER* FORGET HER FACE. I'VE GOT TO *STOP IT!* I'VE GOT --

TOO LATE.

WHA-- ?! I'M IN THE *VOID* AGAIN?!

THEN I WASN'T *QUITE* HOME YET.

I MUST HAVE MISSED THE MARK BY AT LEAST A *DECADE*.

BUT *WHAT* WAS GOING ON THERE? HISTORY NEVER RECORDED ANY TYPE OF IMPERIAL AMERICAN GOVERNMENT OR AN AVENGER DEATH HUNT.

THE CHRONAL BUBBLE'S COLLAPSING.

SHOULD BE CLOSER IN TIME/PLACE TO HOME --

THOR

-- AND JUDGING FROM THE ARCHITECTURE, *I AM.*

IT IS A NIGHT OF STORM.

*AND AS THE LIGHTNING RIPS ACROSS THE SKY, A FIGURE OF **MAJESTY** AND **POWER** IS REVEALED.*

*THE **MASTER** OF THIS STORM, THE **LORD** OF THE WIND AND THE RAIN.*

BOOOOM

NASTY NIGHT.

THOR?!

I MEAN, THAT *IS* YOU, ISN'T IT? I DON'T RECOGNIZE THE COSTUME -- BUT I'VE BEEN GONE A WHILE.

THOR -- WAIT UP! IT'S *ME! YELLOW-JACKET* -- I'VE COME --

-- BACK?!

ANOTHER CHRONAL SHIFT. BUT MUCH SHORTER IN DURATION.

I *MUST* BE SHIFTING BACK TO MY TARGET DATE, GETTING CLOSER WITH EACH JUMP.

BUT THIS ONE BROUGHT ME BACK HERE -- TO *AVENGERS MANSION.*

ORDINARILY, I'D BE JUMPING UP AND DOWN FOR JOY, BUT SOMEHOW AFTER THE WIDOW'S WARNING, THE PLACE SEEMS *LESS* THAN INVITING.

OBOY -- GETTING *DIZZY.*

THEY WARNED ME THIS COULD RESULT FROM A LONG CROSSING.

WHAT'S THIS?

THE DATE! I'M JUST A FEW MONTHS OFF MY TARGET --

FEDS CALL CAP TRAITOR

-- BUT HOW COULD THIS HAVE HAPPENED?

*SUDDENLY, THERE IS A SCREAM OF JETS, AND A GLEAMING **FLASH** OF METAL AS A LONE FIGURE SOARS INTO THE NIGHT.*

IRON MAN

HE *SAW* ME! I KNOW HE DID -- YET HE JUST FLEW ON.

WHY?

LOOKS LIKE I'M NOT GOING TO GET AN ANSWER.

I CAN FEEL THIS ONE COMING ON. TIME FOR ANOTHER --

--JUMP.

OBOY.

FASHRAMK

FASHIRA

IT'S NO GOOD! THEY HAVE THE PLACE TOO WELL PROTECTED!

IF WE GIVE UP HOPE *NOW*, Ms. VAN DYNE, WE ARE *ALL* SURELY DOOMED!

HE'S RIGHT, JAN. WE'VE GOT TO GET TO THE *DOOR*. IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO *END* THIS INSANITY!

JARVIS, ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THIS?

THERE'S *NO* GUARANTEE YOU'LL COME BACK.

I *HAVE* TO GO, MISS CRYSTAL. I'M THE ONLY ONE HE'LL RECOGNIZE.

I CAN'T LET IT END LIKE THIS, MISS. I CAN'T!

AVENGERS! WHAT'S GOING ON?

BLAST -- I'M SHIFTING --

KRAVEN

-- AGAIN!

I'M AT THE MANSION'S DOOR.

YES. AT THE APPOINTED TIME. IN THE APPOINTED PLACE. YOU HAVE CROSSED BACK HOME.

THERE IS NOT MUCH TIME, YELLOW-JACKET.

IF *HE* FINDS OUT I'M HERE, HE'LL KILL ME --

-- BUT YOU MUST *LEAVE* THIS PLACE, BEFORE IT BEGINS.

WHO *ARE* YOU?!

BEFORE *WHAT* BEGINS? TELL --

-- ME!

GONE!

MUST HAVE BEEN SOME TEMPORAL ECHO.

I GOTTA TELL THE AVENGERS WHAT I SAW.

HEY, IT'S *YOU!* THANK GOD!

YOU'RE *NOT* GONNA *BELIEVE* WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ME.

HOW *UNFORTUNATE* FOR YOU --

ESPIMI

AIEEE!

-- I ALREADY KNOW.

AND IN THE EARLY MORNING LIGHT, A LITTLE GIRL, **LUNA MAXIMOFF** BY NAME, LOOKS DOWN FROM HER BEDROOM WINDOW...

AND SEES A SIGHT SHE WILL NEVER FORGET.

THREE HOURS LATER...

...THE SUBWAY.

NOW JUST BE REAL QUIET, LADY.

ALL I WANT IS YOUR PEARLS. Y'KNOW, ALL I'M TRYING TO DO IS EQUALIZE THE ECONOMIC INEQUITIES IN NEW YORK...

RRIPP

LIKE YOU'RE A *HAVE*, AND I'M A *HAVE NOT* --

-- UNTIL *NOW!*

NO! HELP!

STUPID...

STUPID...

COW!

YOU COULDN'T KEEP YOUR MOUTH *SHUT*, COULD YOU?!

I SHOULD HAVE *BROKEN* YOUR JAW WHEN I HAD THE CHANCE!

GOT TO GET OUT OF --

SOME-THING *HIT* ME -- SOME-THING *FAST* --

ARRGGH

WHAT'S THAT?!

THWOK

PUMP

VOOOOOM

SZZZZT

MERELY TO MATCH YOUR BRAIN, MY MALODOROUS FRIEND.

MY HAND -- GONE *NUMB*?!

ALEZ OOP!

CRYSTAL, HE'S *ALL* YOURS!

GEE, THANKS HANK.

HEY!

SOME KIND OF *TORNADO*?! BUT *HOW*?!

ACTUALLY IT WAS A CONCENTRATED WIND BLAST, PAL.

COURTESY OF OUR OWN PRIVATE *ELEMENTAL.*

OH -- GEEZ!

HENRY PYM, THE SIZE-SHIFTING *GOLIATH* CALLED, RATHER PROSAICALLY, **GIANT-MAN.**

CRYSTAL MAXIMOFF, MISTRESS OF FIRE, EARTH AND AIR.

JANET VAN DYNE, THE WONDROUS **WASP.**

PIETRO MAXIMOFF, THE MUTANT SPEEDSTER CALLED **QUICKSILVER...**

...AND *HANK McCOY,* THE HIRSUTE X-MAN KNOWN AS THE **BEAST.**

AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER, AVENGERS ALL.

AND THE LAST THING IN THE WORLD THIS LONE THIEF EXPECTED TO RUN INTO THIS MORNING.

OH -- YOU GOT HIM, THANK GOD! THOSE PEARLS WERE A GIFT FROM MY LATE HUSBAND. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO THANK YOU.

NO THANKS ARE NECESSARY, MA'AM.

THAT'S RIGHT. WHETHER IT'S SAVING THE COSMOS FROM INTERDIMENSIONAL COLLAPSE --

-- OR AIDING THE LOCAL CONSTABULARY IN STOPPING THAT NASTY JAYWALKER --

-- THE MIGHTY ASSEMBLERS ARE ALWAYS AT YOUR SERVICE!

AND WITH A SMILE, TO BOOT!

HANK -- ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

YOU LOOK *PALE.*

I -- I'M FINE, JAN. DON'T WORRY SO MUCH.

WHAT ELSE ARE EX-WIVES FOR, SWEETIE?

WOK

HEY -- THIS JOKER'S TRYING TO GET AWAY!

FAT CHANCE.

THWIPP

ARGGH

YOU!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

AND DON'T YOU THINK AN ARROW THROUGH THE HAND WAS --

-- OH, I DON'T KNOW --

-- A *TRIFLE* SEVERE?

NO.

AND I'M BACK IN THE BIG APPLE FOR THE SAME REASON YOU GUYS ARE.

IT'S THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE *FOUNDING* OF THE AVENGERS, ISN'T IT?

AND MONEY BAGS, *TONY STARK,* IS THROWING A SOIRÉE AT THE BIG HOUSE TO CELEBRATE, ISN'T HE?

SOMEHOW MY INVITATION MUSTA GOTTEN LOST IN THE MAIL, 'CAUSE *WHAT* KIND OF PARTY WOULD IT BE WITHOUT INCLUDING HIS OL' BUD, *HAWKEYE?*

ANSWER: NOT MUCH OF ONE. ANY MORE QUESTIONS?

DELICIOUS

Frui

THE MANSION.

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S BACK. *EXACTLY* THE WAY IT WAS BEFORE IT WAS DESTROYED.

WHEN NATASHA FIRST TOLD ME THE MANSION HAD BEEN RECREATED THROUGH SOME SORT OF COSMIC ACCIDENT, I DIDN'T *REALLY* BELIEVE IT.

BUT HERE IT IS... DOWN TO THE *LAST* DETAIL... THE HOME I GREW UP IN. THE HOUSE I GAVE TO THE AVENGERS WHEN WE FIRST STARTED THE GROUP.

I-- I HADN'T REALIZED HOW MUCH I MISSED THE PLACE, BUT THE MEMORIES KEEP *FLOODING* BACK.

MY MOTHER KISSING ME GOOD NIGHT BEFORE GOING OUT WITH DAD TO SOME GALA OR ANOTHER.

I CAN EVEN REMEMBER HER PERFUME THAT NIGHT, AS IF IT WERE YESTERDAY.

YOU DIED TOO YOUNG, MOM.

NOW DON'T GO MAUDLIN, TONY. THINK *HAPPY* THOUGHTS.

LIKE THE TIME MY VERY *FIRST* GIRLFRIEND AND I SLID DOWN THE GRAND STAIRCASE --

-- ONLY TO MEET A *VERY* DISAPPROVING *JARVIS* AT THE BOTTOM.

JARVIS! LOOK AT HIM -- MAKING SURE EVERYTHING GOES *PERFECTLY* TODAY.

I WONDER WHO'S PROUDER -- HIM OR ME?

SOMETIMES I WONDER WHAT WOULD HAVE BECOME OF ME IF HE HADN'T BEEN AROUND?

I REMEMBER TALKING TO HIM ALL NIGHT LONG AFTER MY FATHER DIED.

HE COULD SEE I WAS HURTING. FRIGHTENED. I WANTED TO FEEL CLOSE TO DAD -- I ASKED HIM TO COOK MY FATHER'S FAVORITE MEAL FOR ME THAT NIGHT.

SEEMS KIND OF SILLY NOW, I GUESS. BUT IT WASN'T THAT NIGHT.

AND HE HELD ME WHEN I CRIED.

MOM, DAD -- I MISS YOU BOTH. I WONDER WHAT WOULD YOU THINK OF THE WAY THINGS TURNED OUT? HOW MY LIFE TOOK A TURN INTO THE *BIZARRE?*

MY DAMAGED HEART -- BECOMING *IRON MAN.* A SUPERHERO, OF ALL THINGS!

FOUNDING THE AVENGERS WITH *THOR* AND *CAPTAIN AMERICA?*

WHAT *WOULD* YOU HAVE THOUGHT?

YOU *MISS* THEM --

-- DON'T YOU?

I MISS THEM *ALL.*

I'M SORRY.

I DIDN'T MEAN TO INTERRUPT... I CAN LEAVE IF YOU LIKE --?

NO, *WANDA* -- PLEASE. STAY

I ALMOST DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YOU IN THAT NEW UNIFORM. IT'S QUITE BECOMING.

I THOUGHT IT WAS TIME FOR A NEW LOOK.

BESIDES, WHY SHOULD THE WASP HAVE THE MARKET CORNERED ON CHANGING COSTUMES?

AND DID MY EARS DECEIVE ME -- OR WAS THAT A COMPLIMENT FROM THE OFFICIOUS ANTHONY STARK?

BECAUSE IF IT WAS -- THANK YOU.

TONY -- ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

MAYBE A BIT MELANCHOLY. ANNIVERSARIES HAVE A HABIT OF DOING THAT TO ME.

WANDA, I KNOW THINGS HAVEN'T BEEN GOING SMOOTHLY BETWEEN US... AND I WANT TO APOLOGIZE.

WE'VE BEEN AVENGERS FOR A LONG TIME. WE HAD A WONDERFUL FRIENDSHIP -- AND I DON'T WANT TO LOSE THAT!

WHAT'S THIS? THE OLD TONY BACK AGAIN? THE WARM, WONDERFUL ANTHONY STARK?

I'VE *MISSED* HIM. WE ALL HAVE.

SO MUCH HAPPENED IN THIS OLD HOUSE. MAYBE ITS RETURN IS A KIND OF A SIGN.

A SIGN WE CAN *ALL* GO BACK TO THE WAY THINGS WERE.

MAYBE THIS ANNIVERSARY CAN BE A CHANCE FOR ALL OF US AT A NEW BEGINNING.

A NEW BEGINNING? I'D LIKE THAT.

MY FRIEND, I'D LIKE THAT *VERY* MUCH!

SEVERAL BLOCKS AWAY, CENTRAL PARK.

HE IS HERCULES, CALLED BY SOME THE PRINCE OF POWER.

UNTIL RECENTLY, HE WAS AN IMMORTAL. ONE OF THE BLESSED WHO LIVED UPON THE VERY SUMMIT OF CLOUD-ENSHROUDED MOUNT OLYMPUS.

HE WAS A LOVER OF FINE WINE, BEAUTIFUL WOMEN AND LIFE LIVED TO THE FULLEST.

BUT HE WAS STRIPPED OF HIS GODHOOD AND FOUND HIMSELF A MORTAL ONCE MORE, AN EXILE AMONGST THE WORLD OF MEN.

SOMETIMES, HE THINKS, IF NOT FOR HIS FELLOW AVENGERS, HE WOULD SURELY GO MAD.

HERCULES --!

WHO?

BY ZEUS'S THUNDER!

WHAT INSANITY IS THIS?! A SPIRIT THAT APPEARS OUT OF NOWHERE -- BUT --

-- SOME-HOW, GIRL -- SOME*WAY* -- I KNOW YOU!

I'VE MADE THE CROSSING... BUT, *BLAST* IT! I DON'T THINK IT WAS SUCCESSFUL.

I'M STILL OUT OF SYNCH WITH YOUR TEMPORAL PATTERNS. YOU MAY NOT REMEMBER *ANY* OF THIS!

THERE'S NO TIME FOR REMINISCING, GODLING!

I'VE RISKED TOO MUCH FOR THIS NOT TO WORK.

LISTEN TO ME, AVENGER. TODAY IS THE DAY.

WHEN THE OLDEST AMONG YOU IS NEAR DEATH, YOU MUST REMEMBER THIS: THE TWINS HAVE MADE THEIR PRESENCE KNOWN TO YOU.

AND YOUR ONLY CHANCE FOR SURVIVAL IS THROUGH INFORMATION I NOW IMPART TO YOU.

FEAR THEM, HERCULES. FEAR THEM VERY MUCH, FOR SHE HAS TRAINED THEM WELL!

SWEET AGON, THE BUBBLE IS COLLAPSING.

THIS MAY NOT HAVE WORKED AT ALL. I NEVER ACHIEVED SYNCHRONICITY --

-- YOU MAY NOT REMEMBER ANY OF THISSSS.

REMEMBER?

REMEMBER WHAT?

LESS THAN AN HOUR LATER...

...IN THE LOWEST LEVEL SUB-BASEMENT OF THE MANSION.

SO THIS IS THE FAMOUS DOOR.

I HAVE TO ADMIT, AFTER HEARING PIETRO AND CRYSTAL'S STORY OF WHAT HAPPENED DOWN HERE A FEW WEEKS AGO, IT KIND OF GIVES ME THE WILLIES.*

* A POWER FLARE IN AVENGERS #385 --Ralf.

AS WELL IT SHOULD, JANET.

WELL, EVEN A *NON*-TECHHEAD LIKE ME KNOWS IT *MUST* HAVE ONE.

HANK, I *KNOW* THAT LOOK. YOU DON'T LOOK HAPPY.

I'M NOT.

WHEN WE FIRST ENTERED THE MANSION, ITS SYSTEMS WERE A BIT *OFF*... ALMOST AVENGERS QUALITY, BUT NOT QUITE.

SINCE THEN, EVERYTHING'S GONE COMPLETELY BACK ON-LINE. I DON'T KNOW *HOW*, BUT I'M BETTING ITS CONNECTED WITH THIS BLASTED DOOR.

AFTER THE MANSION WAS RECREATED, THIS PORTAL WAS THE PRINCIPAL ANOMALY WE DISCOVERED.

IT RESISTS *EVERY* ELECTRO-MAGNETIC AND METALLURGICAL SCAN IN THE BOOK. EVEN TONY'S BEST TECHNICIANS ARE BAFFLED.

THEY THEORIZE THE DOOR MUST GENERATE SOME SORT OF NULL-FIELD, BUT WE CAN FIND NO EVIDENCE OF *ANY* POWER SOURCE.

HANK, I'VE ASKED YOU BEFORE, BUT YOU MUST *TELL* ME.

AND I KEEP WONDERING -- WHY WOULD A DYING WATCHER WHO DIDN'T KNOW US, GIVE US THIS GIFT.

ARE YOU SUGGESTING WE EVACUATE THE MANSION FOR SECURITY REASONS?

SO, HANKSTER, *MORE* PROOF YOU NEED THIS IS OUR OLD MANSION?

I MEAN, BOYCHIK -- IT IS JUST A DOOR.

THE X-MEN HAVE THE MORLOCK TUNNELS IN *OUR* BASEMENT, FOR PETE'S SAKE!

WELL, THAT'S IT THEN.

THE AVENGERS ARE *NOT* TO BE OUTDONE BY THE X-MEN!

OUR SECURITY-SYSTEM KEEPS THE PORTAL UNDER TWENTY-FOUR HOUR SURVEILLANCE. LET'S NOT BE ALARMISTS--

-- AND GET READY FOR THE FESTIVITIES.

THE POKER CHIPS AWAIT, MADAME!

NO WAY, JOSÉ!

THIS PLACE IS A *VERITABLE* TREASURE TROVE! AND IF IT ISN'T OUR ORIGINAL HOME, IT'S DARN NEAR CLOSE!

I JUST FOUND MY PRIZED MICKEY MANTLE ROOKIE CARD! IT WAS THE VERY CENTER-PIECE OF MY ECLECTIC, BUT CHARMING, COLLECTION OF AMERICANA THROUGH THE AGES!

I LOST IT WHEN I MOVED TO RETURN TO THE X-MEN. I WAS ***HEART-BROKEN, DEVASTATED,*** AND *MORE* THAN A LITTLE SUSPICIOUS THAT HAWKEYE HAD PILFERED IT --

-- BUT NO --

-- I FOUND IT UNDER A LOOSE FLOORBOARD IN MY OLD ROOM.

AH! THE ECSTASY OF SEEING A COLLECTION -- ONCE SHATTERED -- NOW COMPLETE!

BUT AS HENRY PYM PREPARES TO JOIN THE OTHERS, HE HESITATES.

WAS THAT -- JUST ON THE EDGE OF HEARING --

-- THE SOUND OF SOMETHING TAPPING?

UPSTAIRS.

YOU SEEM IN AN *AWFULLY* GOOD MOOD TODAY, JARVIS.

I MEAN, YOU'RE BEEN COOKING UP A *STORM!*

I WANT TONIGHT TO GO *PERFECTLY*. IT'S BEEN TOO LONG SINCE MR. STARK, MISS JANET, MISS WANDA, AND MASTER CLINT HAVE BEEN WITH US.

AND *DON'T* THINK I HAVEN'T NOTICED YOU NIBBLING AWAY AT THE HORS D'OEUVRES, MISS *DEATHCRY*. I WISH YOU'D REFRAIN!

IT FEELS LIKE OLD TIMES WITH THEM HERE. *GOOD* TIMES.

YEAH? SEEMS TO ME THAT HAWKEYE GUY DOESN'T CARE MUCH FOR MR. STARK. AND DIDN'T THE WASP AND DR. PYM GO THROUGH AN *UGLY* DIVORCE, AND ISN'T THE SCARLET WITCH RE --

CHILD, *EAT* SOMETHING.

AND I WISH *THIS* WEE ONE WOULD EAT AS WELL, JARVIS.

SHE'S BEEN ACTING *VERY* ODDLY THIS DAY, MY SWEET LITTLE PRINCESS HAS!

MARILLA, PERHAPS WE SHOULD TELL MISS CRYSTAL AND MASTER PIETRO?

WON'T THEY BE CONCERNED THEIR DAUGHTER MAY BE ILL?

SHE'S NOT ILL, I *KNOW* THAT. 'TIS SOMETHING -- ELSE.

BESIDES, I THINK 'TIS TIME MY LADY CRYS AND PIETRO HAD SOME TIME TOGETHER.

JARVIS!

I'M OUT OF THAT MUSTY BASEMENT AND I'M HERE TO *HELP!*

I'VE JUST COME BACK FROM EUROPE WHERE I STUDIED WITH THE *FINEST* CHEFS MONEY COULD BUY. SOME WERE ACTUALLY VERY, *VERY* CUTE!

BUT THAT'S A STORY FOR ANOTHER TIME. WHERE DO I START? I'M PRACTICALLY A GOURMET NOW, IF YOU CAN BELIEVE *THAT!*

WELL, I SUPPOSE MIRACLES *DO* HAPPEN, MISS JANET.

THAT'S *MY* CUE TO LEAVE.

HEY, LITTLE ONE, LET'S SAY YOU AND ME GO UPSTAIRS AND WE'LL WIPE THAT *FROWN* OFF, OKAY?

NOW YE TAKE GOOD CARE OF MY LITTLE *LUNA*, DEATHCRY!

LONG AGO --

-- THIS ROOM (IF, INDEED, IT IS THE SAME ROOM) HAD BEEN A FAVORITE OF MARIA STARK'S.

SHE FOUND IT A WELCOMING, COZY SPOT TO GATHER FRIENDS AND FAMILY FOR INTIMATE DINNERS AND CONGENIAL CONVERSATION.

THOSE FRIENDS AND FAMILY, LIKE MARIA HERSELF, ARE LONG GONE.

BUT THIS EVENING, AS THE WIDOW SOFTLY PLAYS AN OLD ROMANTIC BALLAD ON MARIA'S PIANO --

-- ONE CAN ***ALMOST*** FEEL HER PRESENCE AND SENSE SHE IS PLEASED THE ROOM HAS COME TO LIFE ONCE MORE.

CARE TO JOIN US, AGENT?

NO THANKS, QUICKSILVER.

I ONLY STOPPED BY HERE TO HITCH A RIDE BACK TO THE COAST WITH STARK.

BESIDES, WHEN I PLAY, IT'S FOR THE ***REAL*** THING, NOT THIS PENNY-ANTE STUFF.

YOU ***WOUND*** US, AGENT.

YOUR EXPERTISE AND SKILL WILL BE ***SORELY*** MISSED, AS WILL YOUR ***DELIGHTFUL*** PERSONALITY!

OKAY, LADIES AND GERMS, WE'RE PLAYING FIVE CARD DRAW, NOTHING WILD. JACKS OR BETTER TO OPEN.

BETTER THAN ***WHAT?***

IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THEY HAVE KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR YEARS.

THEY'VE FACED ***DEATH*** TOGETHER MORE TIMES THAN THEY CARE TO COUNT. THEY'VE TRAVELED ACROSS TIME ***AND*** SPACE TO THE FURTHEST REACHES OF REALITY AND BACK AGAIN.

THEY HAVE JOURNEYED TO THE HIGHEST SUMMITS OF LEGENDARY OLYMPUS AND SEEN THE SHIMMERING TOWERS OF LOST ATLANTIS.

THEY'VE KNOWN GODS AND BATTLED DEMONS.

BUT, DESPITE ALL THAT, OR BECAUSE OF IT, IT IS ***THESE*** MOMENTS THEY TREASURE.

WHEN, ON A SUMMER'S NIGHT, FOR A BLESSED HOUR OR TWO, THEY CAN BE THEMSELVES --

-- AMONG FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

PITY IT WILL BE SO BRIEF A RESPITE.

FEELS RIGHT, DOESN'T IT, JARVIS?

INDEED, SIR.

YOU KNOW, I'VE BEEN THINKING A *LOT* ABOUT MOM AND DAD LATELY.

YOU *HAVE* SEEMED A BIT WISTFUL TODAY, SIR.

YES, I--

SIR?

SORRY, JARVIS. I JUST THOUGHT I HEARD THE SOUND OF SOMETHING KNOCKING... VERY FAR AWAY.

READ 'EM AND WEEP, FELLOW ASSEMBLERS!

A

A *FULL HOUSE!* ACES OVER!

IS THIS DEALER'S LUCK OR WHAT?!

HANK, WHAT *EXACTLY* IS DEALER'S LUCK?

YOU'RE LOOKING AT IT, HANK. YOU'RE *LOOKING* AT IT.

I DIDN'T KNOW YOU COULD DEAL FROM THE *BOTTOM* OF THE DECK.

UMMM... YOU CAN WHEN YOU DEAL WITH YOUR *FEET!*

PIETRO! BROTHER DEAR, YOU *KNOW* BEING A VICTIM OF THE BEAST'S CHEATING WAYS IS STANDARD INITIATION FOR ALL AMATEURS.

WHUMP!

BELIEVE ME, CRYS WILL LOOK BACK ON THIS GAME ONE DAY AND LAUGH.

YOU DIDN'T WHEN *YOU* FOUND OUT. YOU WANTED TO SKIN MCCOY ALIVE!

CRYSTAL'S *MUCH* NICER THAN I AM.

ROOM FOR ONE MORE?

THERE IS *NOW.*

COME ON, TONY, JOIN THE *FUN.*

YOU'RE GOOD FOR THAT, AREN'T YOU? THROWING PARTIES, BEING EVERYONE'S SUGARDADDY -- DRINKING THE NIGHT AWAY!

CLINT!

BUT WHERE WERE YOU WHEN *MY* TEAM NEEDED YOU THE MOST, TONY? *HUH?*

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN MY WIFE *DIED?*

CLINT, WE'VE BEEN THROUGH THIS. AGAIN AND AGAIN.

DOES IT DO *ANY* GOOD TO DREDGE IT UP HERE?

I GO THROUGH IT IN MY MIND *ALL* THE TIME. WHAT *IF* I'D BEEN THERE? COULD I HAVE SAVED HER?

BUT I *WASN'T* THERE. I *CAN'T* BE EVERYWHERE. I'M *SORRY* BOBBIE DIED, CLINT --

-- BUT IT JUST WASN'T MY FAULT.

THAT'S **SO** EASY FOR YOU TO SAY, ISN'T IT?

I'M NOT LIKE YOU -- I NEVER HAD MUCH IN LIFE, BUT I HAD BOBBIE. AND NOW, I HAVE *NOTHING*.

HAWKEYE, WE'VE *ALL* SUFFERED LOSS. OUR WAY OF LIFE PRACTICALLY *INVITES* IT.

WE LIVE ON THE *EDGE*, HAWKEYE. AND WE *LOVE* IT. AS BOBBIE LOVED IT. BUT SHE KNEW THE PRECIPICES CAN BE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS PLACES.

CLINT, BELIEVE ME, I *KNOW* WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LOSE PEOPLE YOU LOVE.

BUT BLAMING OTHERS DOES NO GOOD. I KNOW, I'VE *BEEN* THERE.

AS HAVE I, WANDA.

AS HAVE I.

THE *VISION?*

WELL, *THAT* WAS A SURPRISE.

THE VISION WAS THE *LAST* PERSON I EXPECTED TO SHOW UP TONIGHT.

THIS IS HIS HOME AS WELL, PIETRO.

I KNOW, BUT I WORRY FOR MY SISTER.

DID YOU *SEE* HOW SHE LOOKED WHEN HE CAME INTO THE ROOM?

YES. LIKE A WOMAN IN LOVE.

DIP?

I MADE IT MYSELF!

UHHH...

I'M SAVING ROOM FOR DINNER.

DITTO.

COWARDS.

CRYSTAL, I WANT YOU TO LOOK AT ME THAT WAY AGAIN.

I WANT THAT AS WELL, PIETRO. *BELIEVE* ME.

-- IN THE SUB-BASEMENT --

-- A WAVE OF ENERGY PULSES OUT FROM THE DOOR --

FAZZZZT

-- AND THE FIRST MONITOR SHORTS OUT.

THANK HEAVEN *YOU* DIDN'T TURN MY DIP DOWN, HERCULES.

A WOMAN CAN ONLY STAND *SO* MUCH REJECTION.

SO...

...WHY THE LONER ROUTINE TONIGHT?

SOMETHING IS *NAGGING* AT ME.

THEY'VE BEEN OUT THERE A LONG TIME.

AYE.

YOU KNOW, WE AVENGERS HAVE AN *ABYSMAL* TRACK RECORD WHEN IT COMES TO LOVE.

AYE.

I HEARD THAT YOU'VE RECOVERED YOUR EMOTIONS, VISION.

I'M... *GLAD* FOR YOU. I *TRULY* AM.

IT IS WHAT I'VE SOUGHT FOR YEARS.

TO BE WHAT I WAS AGAIN, THE ANDROID WHO COULD FEEL AS WELL AS ANY HUMAN.

BUT LIKE ALL THINGS, IT HAS ITS PRICE.

A THOUGHT -- A MEMORY -- THAT I *KNOW* IS IMPORTANT. BUT JUST WHEN IT'S WITHIN REACH, IT FADES AWAY.

I *HATE* WHEN THAT HAPPENS.

BELOW...

...SECONDARY SCANNERS SPUTTER AND DIE.

...AND YET, NO BACK-UP SYSTEM GOES ON-LINE.

NO ALARM RINGS.

THERE IS ONLY ONE SOUND DOWN HERE IN THE DARK.

TAP TAP TAP

IS ANYTHING WRONG?

NO. I JUST FELT A *CHILL*, AS IF SOMEONE WALKED ON MY GRAVE.

DO YOU HEAR THAT MELODY NATASHA IS PLAYING?

BEFORE, I COULD RECALL THE COMPOSITION IN MINUTE DETAIL AND EXPLAIN ITS CONTEXT IN RELATION TO CURRENT MUSICAL THEORY FOR HOURS.

BUT NOW, I CAN TELL YOU HOW THE MUSIC AFFECTS ME. HOW ITS MELANCHOLY MAKES ME LONG FOR PAST AND BETTER TIMES.

I KNOW NOW WHAT WE LOST, WANDA.

VISION, WHAT'S PAST IS PAST. I --

AND, IN A WAY, BEING A SOULLESS SYNTHEZOID WAS INFINITELY PREFERABLE.

THWOOM

BY ZEUS' BEARD!

PLASMA BURSTS, EXPLODING PRACTICALLY AT OUR DOORSTEP.

BUT THERE IS MORE. ON THAT ROOFTOP --

"-- THE FIGURE OF A MAN, HUDDLING AGAINST THE ATTACK."

FA SHOOM

FA ROOM

ATTACK? BUT BY *WHOM?*

THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY --

-- TO FIND OUT!

"AND IT APPEARS THE ATTACKERS HAVE DECIDED TO REVEAL THEMSELVES."

COME ALONG, SIR.

I'D SAY THIS IS NO TIME TO BE OUT IN THE OPEN.

BUT --

-- IT APPEARS WE'VE REACHED TRAIL'S END.

SKREEEE!

AND OUR PURSUERS ARE RIGHT BEHIND US.

PERHAPS I WAS A BIT --

-- *HASTY* --

-- RACING OUT HERE ALONE.

YOU CAN SAY *THAT* AGAIN, SPEEDY GONZALEZ! THAT'S *TEN* DEMERITS FOR YOU!

OKAY, FOLKS, ONCE MORE, AND *THIS* TIME, LET'S GIVE IT SOME FEELING, OK!?

AH ONE, AH TWO, AH THREE --

AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!

THUNK

THAT'S FOR RUINING MY WINNING STREAK!

THE MANSION.

LADIES AND GENTLE-MEN --

-- DINNER IS --

-- SERVED?

OH, DEAR.

"I SUPPOSE SOMETHING SUDDENLY CAME UP."

A *HEX BOLT* OR TWO OUGHT TO IMMOBILIZE A FEW OF THESE ATTACKERS.

THEN PERHAPS WE'LL FIND OUT *WHO* AND *WHAT* THEY ARE.

DOUBTFUL.

DESPITE THE ORGANIZATION OF THEIR ASSAULT, NONE OF THE BELLIGERENTS HAS UTTERED A WORD SINCE THEIR APPEARANCE.

IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THEY ARE INCAPABLE OF SPEECH.

AND I, MY WIDOW'S LINE.

SHALL WE?

WELL, WE GOT TWO OF THESE *"BELLIGERENTS"* HEADIN' RIGHT FOR US -- AND THEY *DON'T* LOOK FRIENDLY.,

'TASH, I GOT MY CABLE ARROW.

THWIPP

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES, EH?

PERHAPS, CLINT. *PERHAPS.*

BONK

I DON'T GET THIS. THEY NEARLY DESTROY HALF A CITY BLOCK WITH AN INCREDIBLE DISPLAY OF POWER --

-- AND NOW THEY SEEM TO BE GIVING UP THE GHOST.

THERE'S YOUR ANSWER, HANK.

THEY'RE ENTERING SOME SORT OF DIMENSIONAL *WARP.*

AS IF THEY'D *ACCOMPLISHED* WHAT THEY SET OUT FOR.

THIS OLD MAN IS NEAR DEATH.

AND WHO COULD THIS POOR FELLOW --

-- BE!?

YOU *KNOW* HIM?

HE IS GREATLY CHANGED, BUT *YES!*

HE IS THE *ETERNAL* AVENGER -- *GILGAMESH!*

GILGAMESH?

BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE. HE'S *IMMORTAL* -- HE CANNOT AGE.

OR COULD NOT UNTIL TODAY, NATASHA.

UNBIDDEN, WORDS HAVE RETURNED TO ME -- FROM WHERE I CANNOT TELL.

*"WHEN THE **OLDEST** AMONG YOU IS NEAR DEATH, **THEIR** PRESENCE WILL BE KNOWN TO YOU!"*

CAN'T SAY I FIND THOSE WORDS VERY COMFORTING, HERCULES.

NOR I...

"...FOR THEY WERE MEANT AS THE MOST DIRE OF WARNINGS."

ALMOST --!

THERE!

BUT -- I THINK IT'S TOO LATE.

BUT IF THERE'S EVEN THE SLIGHTEST CHANCE TO SAVE HER ---

NO!

OH, SWEET RANDAK--

-- COULDN'T YOU GIVE ME

MARILLA, YOUR EARS MUST BE PLAYING TRICKS ON YOU.

THERE'S *NOTHING* OUT HERE.

NEAR MIDNIGHT...

HOW'S GILGAMESH?

FADING -- SLOWLY, BUT IRREVOCABLY. THE HANKS ARE STYMIED.

ANTHONY.

I JUST WANTED TO SAY I WAS SORRY.

FOR TODAY. THE DISRUPTION OF THE CELEBRATION YOU WANTED SO VERY MUCH...

FOR WHAT?

...AND FOR HAWKEYE.

WE CAME TOGETHER AGAIN, TASHA.

THAT'S *ALL* I REALLY WANTED. DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.

I DO. YOU SEEM SO SAD.

I'VE KNOWN YOU AND CLINT A VERY LONG TIME -- SINCE I FIRST *EMIGRATED* FROM RUSSIA.

YOU ARE *BOTH* IMPORTANT TO ME, AND YOU ARE *BOTH* HURTING.

THIS FEUD *HAS* TO END SOON, MY FRIEND.

OR I AM AFRAID THERE WILL BE NO TURNING BACK.

THE ITSY BITSY SPIDER CLIMBED UP THE WATER SPOUT --

OH, SHARRA'S CLAWS, *I GIVE UP!*

WAAAHH

WHY?

I, FOR ONE, COULDN'T WAIT FOR THE SECOND VERSE.

DON'T MIND HIM, DC. HE'S ONLY TEASING.

HELLO, BABY!

I DON'T GET IT!

ONE MINUTE WITH YOU TWO AND SHE'S LIKE AN *ANGEL!*

I MEAN -- YOU TWO AREN'T THAT MUCH OLDER THAN ME. MUST BE NICE TO BE PERFECT!

PERFECT?

FAR FROM IT. WE MAKE IT UP AS WE GO AND PRAY FOR THE BEST. TWO PEOPLE WHO MARRIED, PERHAPS, A BIT TOO YOUNG...

PERHAPS.

...HOPING TO MAKE THEIR DAUGHTER'S LIFE A LITTLE BETTER THAN THEIR OWN.

SPEAKING OF WHICH --

-- WHERE IS LUNA'S FAVORITE DOLL

PERHAPS *THAT* WILL CALM HER DOWN.

AH, ME! LEFT IT WITH THE WASH I DID!

I'LL GET IT, I WILL!

COME ALONG, DEATHCRY --

-- LET'S LEAVE THE FAMILY ALONE, SHALL WE?

AH, ME!

'TIS WONDROUS INDEED TO SEE MY LADY CRYS AND MASTER PIETRO LAUGHING AGAIN.

PERHAPS FINALLY THEY CAN PUT THE BAD TIMES BEHIND THEM, THEY WILL!

AH, HERE 'TIS!

HOPE THIS DOES THE TRICK. MY LITTLE LUNA SEEMS SO VERY--

-- UPSET?

THAT LIGHT?

LIKE THE SPIRES OF ATTILAN IT GLOWS.

SO BRIGHT IT HURTS ME EYES, IT DOES.

SOMETHING'S HAPPPENING IN THE NEXT ROOM.

I TAKE ME A --

-- PEEK?

OH, SWEET RANDAK!

WHO'S THERE?

'TIS ONLY ME, SIR.

MY, YOU LIKE IT ***BRIGHT***, THOUGH.

THAT WAS THE ***DOOR*** OPENED, WASN'T IT, SIR?

WON'T THE OTHERS BE ***PLEASED*** YOU SOLVED THE MYSTERY!

YOU ***SAW*** IT THEN?

SIR?

IN AN INSTANT...

...SHE REMEMBERS A BOY WITH TEARS IN HIS EYES AND A SECRET WITHHELD...

...AND SHE KNOWS.

SHE HAS TIME TO UTTER A QUICK PRAYER.

EZEKIEL!

AND IT IS OVER.

FORGIVE ME, MARILLA --

-- BUT YOU, LIKE THIS MORNING'S SURPRISE --

-- HAD TO DIE.

Stan Lee presented a Turning Point in the Marvel Universe --

THE CROSSING

BOB HARRAS & TERRY KAVANAGH story

MIKE DEODATO & Studio art

MARIE JAVINS & ELECTRIC CRAYON colors

RICHARD STARKINGS AND COMICRAFT letters

RALPH MACCHIO/editor

BOB HARRAS/chief

special thanks to HELCIO DeCARVALHO & NEL YOMTOV

TO BE CONTINUED in the pages of AVENGERS #391, IRON MAN #321 & FORCE WORKS #16!

5 YEARS EXPERIENCE

From Baaldur, with love...

GLORITH

ADAM & AL